

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 23582

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP, FR (BARRE, RAYMOND)
SUBJECT: POLITICAL PROFILE OF PRIME MINISTER
RAYMOND BARRE

REF: PARIS 37697 (12/21/76)

SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER BARRE SEES HIS SEPTEMBER
TRIP TO WASHINGTON AS AN OCCASION BOTH TO ENHANCE
HIS IMAGE AS A WORLD STATESMAN AND TO REVIEW
MAJOR INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. IN THE SEVERAL MONTHS
FOLLOWING HIS US VISIT, BARRE IS PLANNING TRAVELS
TO THE USSR, HUNGARY, SYRIA, THE FRG AND CHINA.
A MORE STATESMAN-LIKE IMAGE WILL ENABLE HIM TO
DISTANCE RIVALS BOTH WITHIN HIS OWN MAJORITY AND
IN THE OPPOSITION. ALTHOUGH A PROPONENT OF GOOD
FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, BARRE IS GENUINELY
CONCERNED ABOUT FRANCE'S TRADE BALANCE AND THE
STRENGTH OF THE FRANC, ESPECIALLY WITH LEGISLATIVE
ELECTIONS ONLY SEVEN MONTHS DISTANT. DOMESTICALLY
BARRE IS STILL A RELATIVELY NEW FACE TO THE MAN
IN THE STREET, AND IS SHREWD ENOUGH TO CAPITALIZE
THEREON. AS THE MARCH ELECTIONS APPROACH HE
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WILL FIND IT NECESSARY TO ENGAGE HIMSELF IN THE
BATTLE. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER RAYMOND BARRE, FORMERLY MINISTER
OF FOREIGN TRADE (JAN 76 - AUG 76) UNDER THE SECOND
CHIRAC GOVERNMENT, WILL BRING TO HIS SEPTEMBER
15-16 WASHINGTON VISIT YEARS OF FAMILIARITY WITH

USG POLICIES MAINLY THROUGH CONTACTS IN US ACADEMIC AND GOVERNMENT CIRCLES ESTABLISHED DURING HIS FORMER CAREER AS ECONOMICS PROFESSOR AND EC COMMISSIONER. HE WILL ALSO BRING A GENERALLY PRO-ATLANTIC OUTLOOK REGARDING MULTILATERAL AFFAIRS. ON THE OTHER HAND, BARRE IS AWARE THAT A SUCCESSFUL US TRIP WILL REINFORCE HIS CREDENTIALS NOT ONLY AS PM OF FRANCE, BUT ALSO AS AN INTERNATIONAL FIGURE -- AS COMPETENT ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES GENERALLY AS HE ALREADY IS KNOWN TO BE ON ECONOMIC MATTERS. HIS US VISIT IS ONLY THE FIRST OF WIDE-RANGING TRAVEL PLANS FOR THE FALL (PARIS 23049). HIS VIEWS ON US/FRENCH ECONOMIC RELATIONS WERE STATED IN A MAJOR JULY 5 ADDRESS (PARIS 19345 FOR TEXT). IN ESSENCE, HE IS UNDERSTANDING OF USG'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS BUT TOUGH IN DEFENSE OF FRENCH INTERESTS AT THE SAME TIME, SHARING CERTAIN PREOCCUPATIONS ABOUT TRADE AND MONETARY POLICY THAT CROSS THE FRENCH POLITICAL SPECTRUM. HE IS OF COURSE AN OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF THE NEW YORK PORT AUTHORITY'S BEHAVIOR ON CONCORDE.

2. BARRE TOOK OFFICE AMID WIDE HOPES ON THE PART OF MUCH OF THE MAJORITY THAT RIVALRY BETWEEN THE ELYSEE AND MATIGNON WOULD RESOLVE ITSELF, THAT THE ECONOMY WOULD GET BACK ON ITS FEET, AND THAT INFIGHTING AMONG THE MAJORITY PARTIES WOULD CEASE.
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WITH THIS LAST FACTOR IN MIND, GISCARD BROUGHT IN BARRE, THE ECONOMICS PROFESSOR, AND GOT RID OF THE POLITICOS LIKE THEN MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR PONIATOWSKI, MINISTER OF FINANCE FOURCADE, AND MINISTER OF INDUSTRY D'ORNANO, BY KICKING THEM EITHER DOWNSTAIRS OR OUT.

3. BARRE'S RATING HAS MOVED STEADILY UPWARDS IN PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, REACHING A HIGH POINT AT

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THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR. SINCE THEN IT HAS DROPPED SOMEWHAT, BUT HE STILL REMAINS A MAN WITH WHOM ALL THE MAJORITY PARTIES, INCLUDING MOST GAULLISTS, FEEL THEY CAN DEAL. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT BARRE ENJOYS THE CONFIDENCE OF ALL THE MAJORITY PARTY LEADERS; BUT AS THINGS NOW STAND, HE APPEARS TO BE THE MAJORITY'S LOGICAL RALLYING POINT FOR THE MARCH 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. WHILE BARRE'S ROLE AS LEADER OF THE MAJORITY IS HOTLY CONTESTED BY HIS PREDECESSOR AT THE MATIGNON, JACQUES CHIRAC, IT IS STILL DOUBTFUL THAT CHIRAC WILL SUCCEED, AT LEAST AS FAR AS NON-GAULLIST ELEMENTS OF THE MAJORITY ARE CONCERNED, IN BY-PASSING BARRE IN THEIR DECLARED CONTEST FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF THE MAJORITY.

4. THIS FORMER LEADER GRANTEE (1965) AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY HAD, IN 1976, CERTAIN GAULLIST CREDENTIALS. PROTEGEE OF FORMER GAULLIST MINISTER (INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, SOCIAL AFFAIRS) JEANNENEY, BARRE WAS THE MAN IN 1968 WHO HURRIED BACK FROM BRUSSELS TO COUNSEL DE GAULLE, SUCCESSFULLY, AGAINST DEVALUING
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THE FRANC. HE STILL HAS THE REPUTATION FOR BEING HARD-NOSED ON DOMESTIC AS WELL AS FOREIGN MONETARY MATTERS AND REMAINS AN ADVOCATE OF STABLE BUT ADJUSTABLE EXCHANGE RATES. CONCERNING THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY, SOME OBSERVERS REFINE THE EPITHET "HARD-NOSED" INTO "STUBBORN", REFERRING TO HIS INTRACTABLE STANCE ON WAGE RESTRAINTS, CREDIT CEILINGS AND OTHER ANTI-INFLATIONARY MEASURES.

5. SINCE 1976, HOWEVER, THE CURRENT GAULLIST PARTY

(ASSEMBLY FOR THE REPUBLIC--RPR), UNDER THE DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP OF JACQUES CHIRAC, HAS DISTANCED ITSELF SOMEWHAT FROM BARRE FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

A. THE RPR IS CONVINCED THAT BARRE'S AUSTERITY PROGRAM, THAT IS TO SAY HIS TWO PLANS, WILL COST THE MAJORITY VOTES BECAUSE OF THEIR STRINGENT ECONOMIC MEASURES.

B. WHILE THE GAULLISTS WERE FIRST CONVINCED THAT BARRE DID NOT HAVE THE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE TO BE PRIME MINISTER, THE BELIEF NOW IS THAT HE REPRESENTS AS MUCH OF A THREAT TO JACQUES CHIRAC'S LONG RANGE AMBITIONS AS DOES PRESIDENT VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING HIMSELF.

C. BARRE IS SUSPECT TO THE GAULLISTS BECAUSE OF HIS "EUROPEAN" LEANINGS. SINCE GAULLISTS ASSOCIATE "EUROPEANS" WITH "ATLANTICISTS", THERE IS THE BELIEF THAT BARRE ACCEDES TOO READILY TO GISCARD'S "ATLANTIC" (READ: AMERICAN) SOLUTIONS TO EUROPEAN PROBLEMS.

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6. MINISTER BARRE HAS ANNOUNCED PLANS TO RUN IN THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. SHOULD THE MAJORITY WIN THESE ELECTIONS THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT HE WOULD RETAIN HIS JOB AS PRIME MINISTER, SINCE IT COULD BE MAINTAINED THAT THE VICTORY WAS IN PART DUE TO HIS HANDLING OF FRANCE'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. SHOULD THE MAJORITY LOSE THE ELECTIONS, BARRE HIMSELF, ASSUMING THAT HE WINS HIS OWN LEGISLATIVE CAMPAIGN, WOULD TAKE A SEAT ON THE OPPOSITION BENCHES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. WHATEVER THE CASE BARRE, BY VIRTUE OF HIS VERY NEWNESS TO THE FRENCH POLITICAL SCENE, ENJOYS FOR THE TIME BEING A CERTAIN TOLERANCE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC. FURTHERMORE, THERE IS AN UNDERSTANDING AMONG MAJORITY LEADERS, INCLUDING CHIRAC, TO GIVE BARRE THEIR FULL SUPPORT IN WHATEVER DISTRICT HE CHOOSES TO RUN.

7. RIVALRY BETWEEN FRENCH PRESIDENTS AND THEIR PRIME MINISTERS USUALLY BEGINS TO SURFACE TWELVE TO EIGHTEEN MONTHS AFTER THE BEGINNING OF THEIR WORKING RELATIONSHIP. TRUE TO THE PATTERN IN

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THE FIFTH REPUBLIC, RUMORS ARE ALREADY CROPPING UP OF DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRESIDENT. SO FAR, THESE DIFFICULTIES SEEM MORE A QUESTION OF PROTOCOL THAN OF SUBSTANCE, SINCE GISCARD HAS GIVEN BARRE A SEEMINGLY FREE HAND TO RUN FRANCE AS HE SEES BEST. (IN THIS CONTEXT IT MIGHT BE MENTIONED THAT BARRE IS THE FIRST FIFTH REPUBLIC PRIME MINISTER TO HOLD SIMULTANEOUSLY THAT OFFICE AND THE FINANCE MINISTRY PORTFOLIO.) WHILE ON THE ONE HAND BARRE REPRESENTS A THREAT TO CHIRAC, HE ALSO COULD EVENTUALLY REPRESENT A POLITICAL THREAT TO THE PRESIDENT. BARRE'S PERSONAL AMBITION IS NOT COMPLETELY KNOWN. AT THE PRESENT, IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT HE WOULD RETIRE FROM THE SCENE WITH EQUANIMITY SHOULD RELATIONS BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE PRESIDENT BECOME SERIOUSLY STRAINED. THERE IS LITTLE POSSIBILITY, HOWEVER, THAT ANY OPEN DISSENSION WOULD MANIFEST ITSELF BEFORE MARCH 1978.

8. BARRE HIMSELF REPRESENTS A MORE LIKEABLE ("SYMPATIQUE") FIGURE TO THE AVERAGE FRENCHMAN THAN GISCARD. "A SQUARE MAN IN A ROUND FRAME" AS
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HE CALLS HIMSELF, HE IS ENOUGH OF A PROFESSOR TO APPEAL TO CERTAIN OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA, WHILE REMAINING ENOUGH OF A SIMPLE MAN TO APPEAL TO THE MAJORITY ELECTORATE AT LARGE. ALLEGATIONS THAT HE WAS UNPREPARED POLITICALLY TO RUN THE GOF HOLD LESS WATER SINCE HIS MAY 13 TELEVISED DEBATE WITH SOCIALIST LEADER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND (PARIS 14271). BARRE SHOWED HIMSELF A TOUGH DEBATER, A POLITICIAN NOT AFRAID TO TAKE ON AN OLD FOX LIKE THE PS FIRST SECRETARY. HIS ECONOMIC CREDENTIALS, AS EVEN THE UNITED LEFT OPPOSITION WILL ADMIT, ARE INDISPUTABLE.

9. IN PERSONAL CONTACT BARRE IS DIRECT, UNPRETENTIOUS, A CAREFUL LISTENER, AND A MAN WHO GOES TO GREAT PAINS TO EXPLAIN HIS OWN POINTS OF VIEW IN A DIALECTICAL AND ALL-ENCOMPASSING WAY. IN THE RECENT AFFAIR OF GISCARD'S "NEWSWEEK" INTERVIEW, BARRE WAS NOTICEABLY ABSENT FROM THE FRAY. HOW LONG HE WILL KEEP HIMSELF ALOOF, HOWEVER, REMAINS TO BE SEEN. BARRE'S VISIT TO THE US THIS FALL WILL COINCIDE WITH AN OBLIGATION ON HIS PART TO ENGAGE HIMSELF MORE DIRECTLY ON THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL DOWNSTAGE. SHOULD HIS ECONOMIC PLANS THEN BE SHOWING SIGNS OF SUCCESS -- AND BY OPENING FAUCETS BARRE CAN GIVE HIS PLANS AT LEAST THE APPEARANCE OF SUCCESS -- HE WILL ENTER THE BATTLE REINFORCED. ONE THING IS CERTAIN: THE PRIME MINISTER IS NOT AT ALL CONVINCED IN THE INEVITABILITY OF A LEFT VICTORY.
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